April 16, 2020

Acting Commissioner Mark A. Morgan
U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
Department of Homeland Security
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20229

Dear Commissioner Morgan:

I write to express concern about the reinstatement of full staffing at Land Ports of Entry (LPOE) along our northern border in light of our nation’s ongoing fight against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The job of protecting our nation’s borders is essential and can never be put on hold, but that mission can only be accomplished with healthy Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers. As of April 14, 236 CBP employees nationwide have tested positive for COVID-19.

In March, CBP instituted revised work schedules and reduced staffing at LPOEs in order to allow for increased social distancing, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and to minimize the overall risk to the workforce on any given day. This change corresponded with a dramatic drop in non-commercial cross-border traffic following the closure of the U.S.-Canada border to non-essential travel. However, a new directive effective on April 6 cancelled these revised schedules and reinstated full staffing at LPOEs, which I fear in many locations could needlessly increase the risk of exposure to and spread of COVID-19.

As the former Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, I understand the unique challenges that CBP faces and appreciate the difficulties that your agency has in securing the border in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The safety of CBP employees is paramount to ensuring continued lawful transit of essential goods and people across our border, many of which are crucial in our fight against this pandemic. I ask you to take the actions necessary to protect the health and safety of CBP officers and the rest of the workforce, including a review of whether reduced staffing at LPOEs may be warranted given the minimal flow of non-commercial traffic, while also ensuring CBP’s vital mission is accomplished.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator